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'In dance we trust': comparing trance-dance parties among secular and Orthodox Israeli youth

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ABSTRACT

Israel is arguably a place where music-centred 'trance-dance' parties have attained their highest degree of national/cultural prominence, with these events being extremely popular in secular communities and even among Orthodox youth. Based on findings from ethnographic research, the article compares the core features – settings, participants and conduct – of trance parties for secular and Orthodox Israeli youth and examines the functions they perform for each group of partygoers. The findings point to variances in the cultural and personal needs that participation in trance parties fulfils for these disparate communities, which, accordingly, are reflected in their contrastive features. At the same time, both communities of partygoers paradoxically reproduce the very same attitudes and practices their participation intends to challenge, demonstrating that, unlike in other countries, the consumption of psychedelic electronic dance music culture in Israel is essentially devoid of subversive intentions.

KEYWORDS Psychedelic electronic dance music culture (PEDMC); secular and Orthodox Israeli youth; trance-dance parties; cultural change; ethnography

Trance has taken over the streets. It bubbles out from passing vehicles, is heard in the kiosks and grocery stores and deafens us in the boutiques. It is in television commercials, fashion shows, malls, half-time shows at football and basketball games, at *bar* and *bat mitzva* celebrations, circumcision rites and weddings... Its sound is now localised and familiar.¹

In the past two decades music-centred 'trance-dance' parties have become a prominent fixture within the Israeli leisure cultural landscape.² Versions of this postmodern music-centred subculture exist across the globe, yet Israel is arguably where its expression has attained the highest degree of national cultural prominence. Contextualised as psychedelic electronic dance music culture (PEDMC), the local popularity of 'trance' has led to Israel being recognised as a world 'trance power', with an impressive roster of internationally acclaimed DJs (disc jockeys) and a reputation for year-round, no-holds-barred PEDMC parties and festivals.³

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In Israel trance-dance events occur among all manner of class and community and even within communities of Orthodox Israeli youth where this sort of event is unexpected.⁴ While researchers have examined aspects of trance parties for secular participants, less is known about these gatherings among Orthodox Jews and the functions that PEDMC consumption serves for this sector. This article compares the cultural and personal functions that such parties perform for secular versus Orthodox youth and the core features of those events – the particular settings in which they are held, the characteristics of their participants as well as styles of dance and other manner of conduct displayed within the respective party environments. The analysis explains how variances in the core features of the secular and Orthodox parties result from the differences between the cultural and personal needs that these parties fulfil for each community and how, despite those differences, partygoers from both sectors apply elements from their socio-cultural backgrounds to similarly construct a pattern of PEDMC consumption that is apparently unique to Israel.

The findings discussed in this article are drawn from a larger body of data collected over the past decade and a half during the course of extensive ethnographic fieldwork at both styles of PEDMC events. Fieldwork included participant observation at secular and Orthodox trance-dance parties, in-depth interviews with party producers and attendees and the monitoring of Israeli PEDMC-oriented social media. The comparative analysis of the data relates to cultural theory frameworks and is based on an examination of the findings vis-à-vis literature pertaining to the broader cultural contexts within which these events take place.

Mesibot: trance parties for secular youth

Secular Israeli trance-dance parties are furtive, all-night affairs held in remote outdoor locations at which participants, who refer to themselves as ‘*trancistim*’ (*trancist* in singular), ingest narcotic mood enhancers (especially psychedelics) and consume electronic music, primarily through dancing. Our findings indicate that, overall, *trancistim* are a heterogeneous mix of young (17–40) secular Jewish Israelis from a broad spectrum of age, gender, socio-economic, political, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds who live in both urban and rural areas in a range of domestic circumstances. Often *trancistim* spend years attending these events. While initially, in the 1990s, attending parties was considered by the mainstream public to be subversive in nature, with the passing of time, trance-dance events have evolved into a broad-based – but not an entirely legitimate – local leisure activity.⁵ Thus, although many *trancistim* are recreational drug users, our interviews with them reveal that the vast majority maintain normative productive lives within quotidian Israeli society.⁶

A model Israeli PEDMC party setting requires a hard-to-reach natural venue where participants can enjoy themselves with the certainty that their good time

will remain undisturbed by the affairs of the outside world. Both male and female *trancistim* of all ages reported that the distant party location permits them to make use of these events – which they refer to as ‘*mesibot teva*’ (nature parties) or simply ‘*mesibot*’ (*mesiba* in singular) – as a form of therapeutic escapism from the contested place that Israel holds in the chaotic Middle East. The secluded locations generate a unique atmosphere and allow for *trancistim* candid self-expression. *Mesibot* participants often dress up in colourful costumes, wear hats and wigs and apply face and body paint. *Trancistim* may further contribute to the party ambiance through random free-form performance art such as fire or poi juggling, stilt walking, drumming and interpretive dance. Moreover, to enliven the mood, *mesibot* producers mount large field art installations around the party venue and hire VJs (video jockeys) who mix abstract geometric images and digitised stock footage onto screens adorning the *mesibot* dance floors. These devices illuminate the otherwise dark surroundings and form a bizarre contrast with the unspoiled natural landscape.

The privacy afforded by the party venues also enables extensive drug-taking among participants. *Trancistim* employ psycho-actives such as LSD and MDMA to enhance their moods and augment their music listening experience.⁷ Additionally, in our interviews with *trancistim*, they stated that they consume drugs in order to invoke mystical voyages of intellect and spirit. At the same time, the normative drug use taking place among *trancistim* constitutes the breaking of several laws and lends *mesibot* – which themselves are usually held without proper permits – a risky or deviant aura.⁸ This state of mind resembles the experiences *trancistim* undergo during their mandatory military service where they serve in remote locations, are active for extended hours at a time and, due to the extremity of the situation, may experience ephemeral comradery.⁹ The resemblance to military service is particularly interesting since, when asked about it, *trancistim* noted that their participation in trance parties was an expression of their pacifism and a way for them to forget about their military duties for a while.

‘Psytrance’ is the dominant electronic dance music genre heard at *mesibot*, and Israeli DJs are renowned for playing an up-tempo and lyric-less psytrance sub-genre known as ‘Full-on’. Produced with the intent of being played at high volume on outdoor dance floors, the hypnotic cadence (145 beats per minute) of the repetitive hard-hitting 4/4 beat lends the music a certain primordial, inter-cultural, appeal with the non-stop thumping of the digitally tempered bass-line resembling the pulses of a heart.¹⁰ Successful DJs produce a ‘smooth flow’ of music that can momentarily transport participants into a kind of collective ‘equilibrium’.¹¹ This dynamic is central to *mesibot*, and, from our observations – especially when they are under the influence of serotonin-inducing ‘empathogens’ like MDMA – when *trancistim* listen/dance to psytrance for extended periods, they may be propelled into elevated states of transcendental awareness during which time they claim the music becomes seductively entified.

When combined at *mesibot*, the remote venues, drugs and mesmerising trance-dance music foster a sequence of powerful or '*puissant*' moments during which a symbiotic interaction between private and public spheres takes place.¹² Emblematic of late-modern subcultural constructs in general, the collective macro consciousness – located in the uplifting mood of the self-contained party and inspired chiefly by the mystical communion engendered by the music and drugs – is fostered through an ongoing series of subjective micro occurrences. With reference to Victor Turner's delineation of the 'transitory phase' of public performance, the coinage 'hallucinatory *communitas*' seems aptly to describe the momentary communion experienced among *trancistim* at PEDMC gatherings.¹³ Indeed, the isolated and concealed *mesibot* locations combine with the pulsating intensity of the music and drugs to construct an extraordinary 'moment in and out of time'¹⁴ in which a kind of sacred bond may form among *trancistim*.

Similar to how the distant party venues enable *trancistim* escapism, *trancistim* reported that this momentary communion is a form of dance therapy, which serves as an exceptional countermeasure for coping with the intensity of Israeli society and politics. Yet, as with other ritual states of communality, hallucinatory *communitas* is inherently ephemeral and basically disappears outside the *mesibot* setting. Hence, although during the week *trancistim* may connect through social media channels in order to find out when and where future events will occur, they do not necessarily form an explicit socio-political community beyond the *mesibot* context, since this would offset the detached setting they aim to conjure at *mesibot*.

While attending *mesibot*, *trancistim* limit their spoken discourse for hours on end. When questioned, *trancistim* contended that they are using non-verbal avenues of communication to express themselves. This claim accords with the observations of the anthropologist Judith Lynne Hanna that non-verbal communication is 'more powerful than the verbal for expressing such fundamental feelings and contingencies in social relationships as liking, disliking, superiority, timidity, fear and so on ...'¹⁵ Hanna suggests that dancing is closer to poetry or signage rather than prose in that it 'conveys messages whose understanding depends on shared, often nonverbal assumptions held by friendship or peer groups'.¹⁶

In accordance with Hanna's depictions, our observations revealed that *trancistim* 'converse' with one another through dance. That is, *trancistim* dancing combines numerous body movements – darting expressions, oscillating hand and leg movements, rhythmic kicks, stabs, jabs and gyrations – into a seemingly choreographed message. The rhythm of the music replaces the traditional function of the lyrics. Rather than with words, mood, feeling and cognitive message are expressed through beat, tempo and instrumentation and so reinforce the 'rhetoric of otherness'¹⁷ essential for successful PEDMC activity.

Since at *mesibot* physical dancing replaces physical speech, *trancistim* minimal interpersonal verbalism does not impede their ability to capitalise on the collective energy of a party. Yet, while they endeavour to stay ‘in beat’ with the larger transpersonal group enterprise, *trancistim* style of dance manifests on an individual basis. Although *trancistim* ecstatically dance together, on the same dance floor at the same time, they have no physical contact with one another and so appear as autonomous, solitary entities. This mode of dancing is in direct distinction to more traditional forms of communal dance such as square or line dances wherein participants’ bodies actually touch one another or face each other or dance together as a couple or a group in a ritualised manner. In interviews, *trancistim* repeatedly explained that despite the communal aspect of *mesibot*, these events provided opportunities for them to be alone, a condition which they claimed was the mark of a good party, since it enabled them to express themselves as individuals while also distancing them from the constrictive Israeli collective.

Trancistim self-centred individuality is also reflected in that *mesibot* seem to lack an outright sexual atmosphere. This absence appears linked to the feral outdoor locations, the libido-eliminating drugs *trancistim* ingest and the physical strain caused by a lack of sleep and hours of dancing. Furthermore, as casual sexual encounters are a customary part of the everyday lives of young secular Israelis, *trancistim* feel less compelled to engage specifically in the fulfilment of sexual gratification at *mesibot* and tend to concentrate more on the spiritual or self-indulgent aspects of the event. As a result, while at parties, *trancistim* tend to shun the conquest-like behaviour that is often associated with the pursuit of casual sexual activity.

In interviews and in online posts that we monitored for this study, *trancistim* claim to abide by a live-and-let-live behavioural creed, which recognises that acceptable conduct at *mesibot* necessitates a culturally liberal and socially tolerant stance towards others. Yet, *trancistim* ideals are often inconsistent with their practices. For instance, in promotional emails, invites and social media posts, party crews discuss the need to keep knowledge of the parties to themselves as a precaution against attracting uninvited participants. Since *mesibot* are held without proper permits, this warning ostensibly relates to their being found out and shut down by law enforcement agents. While rarely discussed publicly, when questioned privately, *trancistim* often interpret this entity to refer to people who are not connected to PEDMC on a social, cultural or spiritual level, but attend *mesibot* with more carnal intentions.

Both at parties and in PEDMC-oriented social media channels, *trancistim* refer to themselves as ‘*Anashim Yafim*’ (nice/beautiful people) and to the uninvited public as *Arsim* (*Arse* in singular). *Anashim Yafim* denotes a typical, well-behaved, middle-class *trancist* of Ashkenazi (Anglo-European, *Ashkenazim* in plural) descent. In contrast, *Arse* is an Arabic word that literally means ‘pimp’ and in Israeli slang implies ‘a jerk’. Within the *mesibot*

environment, the term *Arsim* designates people (men) whose conduct does not conform to expected behavioural codes; while at parties, for instance, they make spectacles of themselves by fighting, damaging property or talking aggressively to women. Although in an array of social media posts, *trancistim* clearly state that there is no place at *mesibot* for 'Ashkenazi pretensions', they stereotypically identify *Arsim* as Oriental Jews of North African or Middle Eastern descent. The disparity between these egalitarian ideals and their lax implementation emerged in interviews with *trancistim* who, despite having described themselves as liberal-minded, frequently claimed that a major part of what contributes to the success of a *mesiba* is the predominance of *Anashim Yafim* and the noted absence of *Arsim*.

One of the devices used by *trancistim* to maintain their exclusivity is noted in the tendency of party producers to charge high entrance fees for *mesibot*. *Trancistim* exclusivity is further reflected in the fact that *mesibot* fliers and the word samples in Israeli full-on, as well as much of the slang in *trancistim* digital communication, are in English. Several interviewees noted that the use of a foreign language acts to differentiate between the party environment and conventional society. Moreover, *trancistim* claimed to object to Israeli ethnocentrism and stated that the use of English drew them closer to contemporary global culture in general and PEDMC in particular.

In an analogous manner, Israeli sociologist Uri Ram describes how in the present era of 'liberal post-Zionism and the glocal age', the names of stores in large retail Israeli shopping malls are commonly written in English.¹⁸ The widespread use of English transforms these venues into 'sterile zones, isolated from the humid and belligerent Middle Eastern environment. They create an illusion of being "here" and feeling "there" – as any proper globalist simulation should'.¹⁹ Since *mesibot* physically separate *trancistim* from their conventional social settings, they provide participants with a feeling that what takes place inside these 'other-worlds' is qualitatively different from the goings-on within their customary societal domains.²⁰

Nevertheless, even as *trancistim* identify with cosmopolitan philosophies, *mesibot* are regularly held on Jewish or national holidays and feature symbolic décor that blends traditional Jewish/Zionist holiday motifs with various clichéd strands of New Age/neo-pagan or Far-Eastern iconography (e.g. Indian Oms, Celtic symbols, fire-breathing dragons, Chinese ideograms). These motifs include, for example, Candelabras, Stars of David and sheaths of wheat *Shavuot* (Festival of Weeks). Concurring with data presented earlier, this finding points to the fact that *trancistim* attitudes and general demeanour paradoxically reproduce – instead of alter or otherwise improve – the very forms they are attempting to evade.

Dosibot: trance parties for Orthodox youth

The consumption of trance-dance parties by Orthodox Israeli youth is a clear indication of the extent to which PEDMC has penetrated beyond secularised Israeli communities into diverse local social arenas. Trance-dance parties for young Orthodox Israelis are colloquially known as '*dosibot*'. The word *dosibot* is a combination of *dos*, which is Hebrew slang for '*dati*' (Orthodox Jew, *dati'im* in plural) and the feminine plural suffix *bot*, as in *mesibot*. If the secular '*trancist*' prototype is the readily recognised, or unmarked, form within greater Israel, its marked *dati* counterpart, the '*dosist*' (our term) is less patently identifiable since so-called 'religious Jewry' is splintered into an array of sub-factions. Yet, despite their nuances, these groups form a single unit with *dati'im* being synonymous with *dati'im leumi'im* (National Religious; *dati leumi* in singular), Israeli Jews who maintain an outlook that is principally, if not exclusively, centred on an ideologically observant lifestyle.²¹ *Dati'im leumi'im* compose their identities from an ongoing identification with formalised religious Jewry, a firm commitment to the Zionist-oriented Israeli national imperative and a daily lifestyle which closely coincides with the secular Israeli mainstream.²²

When questioned about their consumption of PEDMC, the *dosistim* whom we interviewed explained that they are an integral part of Israeli society and claimed that, like secular youth, to avoid being seen as 'outsiders' within their communities, they must remain aware of the current changes occurring in contemporary Israel. Their explanation accords with recent research on transformations among young *dati'im leumi'im*.²³ These analyses show that, on one hand, despite the exposure of *dati'im* to the influences of late-modernity, they remain keen to preserve their Orthodox identities. On the other hand, both due to their dissatisfaction with the Orthodox establishment's taut ideological ties to its formulistic religious principles and practices and to their desire to stay abreast with the secular mainstream, many young *dati'im* are extending their traditionally directed communal norms by including contemporary secular Israeli cultural elements and mannerisms into their devout lifestyles.

The analyses of this dynamic have focused on young *dati'im* embracement of secular cultural components such as post-military overseas backpacking trips and the use of digital and cellular global media.²⁴ Yet, as opposed to their engagement with these forms, *dati'im* incorporation of trance-dance parties into their Orthodox life-worlds seems less obvious. As explained below, *dosibot* attract both male and female participants. This puts attendees at risk of violating Orthodox law which explicitly forbids physical relations or any other activity that could potentially lead to an '(in)voluntary discharge' prior to marriage.

Relating to how, despite this hazard, *dosibot* became popular among *dati'im*, *dosistim* noted that beyond their desire to remain contemporary, these parties also assisted them in locating potential life partners. This function is related to the 'relationship crisis' currently impacting *dati* communities, a situation that

is rooted in the fact that *dati'im* are basically raised in single-gender environments – primary schools, youth movements, Torah academies. Once they have completed the army and national service tracts and enter the work world, the Orthodox socio-cultural framework provides few recreational opportunities to fraternise with available members of the opposite sex. This leads to tension since the first *mitzvah* (divine commandment; *mitzvot* in plural) in the Torah is to ‘be fruitful and multiply’, a celestial directive that implicitly entails marrying at a young age that, according to current *dati* conventions, means ‘before thirty’.²⁵ This widely acknowledged deadline heightens the anxieties of unwed *dati'im*, especially females, who feel compelled to conform to this expectation.²⁶

Our findings indicate that while at *dosibot*, *dosistim* realign the modes of conduct common to secular trance-dance parties so as to create opportunities to find partners while remaining within bounds of Orthodox dictates pertaining to social interactions among the sexes. Offering like-minded participants a safe setting in which to pursue their particular goals, *dosibot* generally share the same structure: they are held at familiar and accessible commercial venues, charge little or nothing to enter, and feature the same kinds of music and activities. Moreover, in contrast to *trancistim*, *dosistim* are characterised by their homogeneity. Typically, *dosibot* participants are unwed, twenty-something, middle-class, well-educated, veteran residents (second generation or older), Ashkenazi (sub)urbanites living with or near their parents. As discussed in the previous section, these circumstances are reversed at *mesibot*, whose purposeful otherworldliness evokes an allure of danger and unfamiliarity that seems to underscore the bizarre nature of these events and encourage participants’ unconventional behaviour.

Attendance rates at *dosibot* vary from party to party, but, on average, these events draw hundreds of participants per night, as compared to *mesibot*, that sometimes attract thousands of attendees. *Dosistim* interest in *dosibot* can be quite intense at first but tends to wane rather rapidly as they either realise their objectives and move on or, having repeatedly failed to achieve their goal, abandon this line of pursuit. Like *mesibot*, *dosibot* usually coincide with the weekend and/or religious holidays. Yet, unlike *mesibot*, *dosibot* are routinely held on Thursday or Saturday nights rather than on Friday nights, which is the start of the Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest) and a time when Orthodox Jews refrain from worldly activities such as travelling, working and consumerism. To expedite participation, *dosibot* are held in metropolitan areas in proximity to where the majority of *dosistim* live, work and study. Moreover, unlike *mesibot*, *dosibot* are staged legitimately, in *dati*-oriented public or commercial venues such as neighbourhood civic centres, synagogue reception halls and kosher pubs. Also, *dosibot* occur during regular night time entertainment business hours (20.00–02.00), in contrast to *mesibot*, that ordinarily last all night and into the following afternoon.

Our observations indicate that the DJs at *dosibot* play dance music that is easily digested by their *dati* listeners who commonly possess limited knowledge of the various categories and sub-styles of electronic dance music (EDM). Composed from a combination of EDM genres remixed with fragments of Israeli pop tunes, this music resembles what is often played at mainstream secular Israeli familial and public celebrations. The music weaves bits and pieces of popular melodies and/or lyrics into the dance tracks, and *dosistim* may sing along as they dance. As such, *dosistim* fellowship is manifested via their mutual recognition/appreciation of the lyrics/tunes of these well-known Hebrew songs rather than through collective drug use and/or a shared sense of deviance. This use of familiar music contrasts with the tendency of *mesibot* DJs to cater to *trancistim* psytrance savviness by playing ‘unreleased’ or unrecognised tracks whose unfamiliar arrangements and rhythmic tonality further contributes to the foreign atmosphere of these events.

During our fieldwork we also observed that *dosistim* do not have one fixed mode of dancing and may separate into gendered clusters or dance in tandem with multiple partners from either sex. Unaccustomed to dancing to this type of music, *dosistim* perform steps borrowed from traditional folk and wedding-style line dances. The *dosistim* we interviewed stated that they had previously encountered these dance styles at events held in synagogues, youth movements and *Torah* academies where single-gendered community dances regularly take place on Shabbat and religious and national holidays. Within the context of *dosibot*, however, these group-based dance styles enable *dosistim* to maintain certain Orthodox conventions pertaining to modesty at co-gendered public gatherings, while also permitting self-conscious or shy participants to go undetected. As with other facets of *dosibot*, *dosistim* collective manner of dancing contrasts with *trancistim* dance style which is solitary and abstract as independent dancers seldom face one another or come into direct or deliberate bodily contact.

Dosistim attire is simple both by *dati* and/or secular standards. This reflects *dati leumi* aesthetic sensibilities which are pragmatic and straightforward, an approach which inundates this sector’s religious performance, commercial practices and leisure habits and typifies *dati’im* overall fashion sense and cultural temperament.²⁷ This viewpoint stems from the ethic of *t’zniyut* (humility, simplicity), an Orthodox ideal that stipulates that God-fearing Jews should strive to lead chaste and self-effacing modest lives. *Dosistim* explained that their simple dress mode assists them in conveying a positive impression upon potential spouses by demonstrating their commitment to Orthodox conventions and their ability to negate extravagant, fashion-driven global patterns of consumption. This discretion may also explain why psychoactive stimulants, which are both expensive and illegal, are entirely absent from the *dosibot milieu* and why *dosistim* tend to favour (cheaper/abstemious) soft drinks over (expensive/intemperate) hard drinks.

The lighting at *dosibot* is routinely dimmed so as to allow *dosistim* discreetly to search for prospective partners. Soft lighting is especially fitting for sexually awkward *dosistim* as it allows them to engage in their less-than-orthodox activities without becoming overwhelmingly self-conscious. As a result, even as *dosistim* make efforts to comply with the Orthodox restrictions regarding physical contact between the sexes, their involvement with *dosibot* inevitably leads to a build-up of sexual tension. It is therefore not surprising that in contrast to *mesibot* etiquette, we witnessed how, under the cover of near darkness, *dosistim* convey their desires via flirtatious conversation and suggestive dancing and, paradoxically, both express *and* repress their urges simultaneously. Ironically, *dosistim* resolve to remain within bounds of the religious mores of their communities inadvertently produces their sexually suggestive behaviour at *dosibot*.

Contrary to *mesibot*, which normally attract fewer women than men (roughly 40/60), *dosibot* have a higher female-to-male ratio (roughly 60/40). This is likely due to the fact that the *dati* society places a greater amount of pressure on single females to wed.²⁸ Within *dati leumi* communities, unwed *dati* women – particularly those who have reached their thirties – are culturally limited both on a social/stigmatic and a religious/spiritual level and are unable to perform a number of crucial *mitzvot* such as menstruation rites and candle-lighting rituals. In absence of an institutionalised matchmaking network, *dati* women are often obliged to locate potential spouses outside the confines of their customary Orthodox environs.

Another difference between *dosibot* and *mesibot* was detected in the manner in which they are promoted. In contrast to *mesibot*, which are selectively publicised in order to ensure their concealment, *dosibot* are openly advertised via fliers, posters, web-forums and word-of-mouth so as to draw as large a crowd as possible. Moreover, we found that *dosibot* adverts are usually written with standard Hebrew fonts, provide abundant information and clearly list the proper names and personal phone numbers of the party organisers. *Dosibot* fliers are simple and precise and commonly contain generic motifs from the Jewish-Israeli holidays connected with the parties. This candid approach contrasts with the enigmatic nature of *mesibot* fliers whose coded wording and limited details are comprehensible only to privileged insiders.

It turns out that *dosibot* venues are secondary to the action that takes place at them. The *dosibot* promoters whom we interviewed claimed that they make little effort to garner product recognition among partygoers because they recognise that *dati'im* participation in these events is short-lived. For this reason *dosibot* are normally void of bannered logos and other micro-marketing materials (fliers, CDs, stickers, T-shirts) which are *de rigueur* at PEDMC events where they are used to market a producer's particular *mesibot* brand. Similarly, *dosibot* organisers whom we spoke with noted that they regularly cut their production costs by foregoing elaborate decorations and rarely bedecked party venues with anything more than the most elementary store-bought adornments (e.g.

balloons, streamers, confetti, tissue-paper garlands). Akin to the manner in which *dosistim* attend parties in their regular clothing so as to express their commitment to an Orthodox lifestyle, the relatively tame *dosibot* settings allow *dosistim* to remain at ease in what can otherwise be an awkward and off-putting experience.

As a marked entity, '*dosibot* culture' largely exists within the immediate party habitus, since otherwise *dosistim* tend to be indistinguishable from other *dati'im*. To wit, even as the *dosibot* environment is somewhat unorthodox, the *dosistim* we interviewed claimed that their experiences at these events do not have a lasting impact on their Orthodox beliefs and practices, nor does their attendance bear upon them negatively within their communities. In fact, recent studies found that, in many instances, the participation of *dati'im* in secular-based leisure activities actually serves to reinforce their commitment to an Orthodox lifestyle.²⁹

Nevertheless, *dati'im* use of a secular culture form like PEDMC to contend with a problematic situation encountered within their daily life realms is an ironic scenario within which bass-heavy EDM has become the unlikely soundtrack for this generation's mating rituals. Pulsating trance-dance music appears well suited for sexually inexperienced *dosistim* who consider its all-encompassing cadence the perfect cover for the inappropriate interactions that take place on the shadowy *dosibot* dance floors. As the trance rhythm works to activate a sort of hormonal amphetamine among dancers, the music electrifies the heated crowd, enabling *dosistim* momentarily to overcome their inhibitions and achieve their goal in much the same manner that full-on psytrance and the shared psychedelic experience activates hallucinatory *communitas* among *trancistim* and so lends *mesibot* their restorative *puissance*. The opportunity to experience this lively atmosphere provides *dosistim* with the feeling that they are no different from their secular counterparts.

Conclusions

The article shows that in Israel there exist two contrastive styles of trance-dance parties, which are distinguished by their setting, types of participants and their conduct. The first kind of parties are secular *mesibot* which are modelled after archetypical PEDMC trance-dance parties and feature booming rhythm-driven psytrance, prevalent drug use, an individualised mode of dancing and spiritual undertones. The second kind of parties are Orthodox *dosibot*, which feature popularised electronic dance music, an absence of stimulants, a group-oriented mode of dancing and a joyous atmosphere juxtaposed with attempts at modesty and temperance. The contrastive facets of *mesibot/dosibot* are summarised in Table 1.

The differences in these two party scenes derive from the distinctive cultural contexts particular to each community. The rise of PEDMC in Israel in

Table 1. Contrastive features of secular *mesibot* vs. Orthodox *dosibot*.

Core features	Components	Secular <i>mesibot</i>	Orthodox <i>dosibot</i>
Setting	fliers	coded, mysterious, implicit	clear, detailed, explicit
	party location/legality	remote outdoors, unauthorised	convenient kosher bars and banquet halls, authorised
	party time	unbounded, holidays/weekends	routine hours, holidays/weekends
	décor	emphasised, sensational, homemade	unelaborate, simple, purchased
	music	full-on psytrance, loud and intense	popularised EDM
Participants	age range	17–40	20–30
	male/female ratio	60/40	40/60
	domestic condition	miscellaneous	single
	socio-economic standing	middle-class, multi-ethnic, urban/rural	middle-class, (sub)urban Ashkenazi
Conduct	Socio-cultural affiliation w/ PEDMC	strong, ongoing	non-existent, temporary
	dress	outlandish scene-specific style and gear	ordinary, unexceptional
	stimulant usage	prevalent, brazen	uncommon, tempered
	dance style	solitary, self-absorbed	group-centred, interactive
	sexuality	secondary	heightened

the past two decades coincided with a number of changes taking place during that period within mainstream Israeli society.³⁰ Before that time, Israeli ideology was based on the Jewish-nationalist ethos of Zionism, which developed in nineteenth-century Europe with a stated goal of creating a homeland for the Jewish Diaspora. As it emerged from Europe, Zionism was preferential towards Anglo-European Jewry, placing a strong emphasis on collectivism, patriotism and dutiful service in the national defence forces. Yet, by the early 1990s, the influx of globalisation and neo-liberal economics and culture supplanted the spirit of socio-nationalism with the self-absorbed pursuit of secular materialism among considerable segments of the Israeli populace.³¹ As such, these former ideals lost much of their relevance and appropriateness to the contemporary Israeli situation and were replaced with post-Zionist philosophies, which emphasised individualism and critiqued the Ashkenazi elite, the ethnocentric Israeli society and its cultural glorification of military service.³² This transformation in outlook particularly altered the perceptions of identity and selfhood of the younger generations who critiqued the norms and values of the country's founding generations.³³

Researchers generally recognise that the void created by the erosion of the Zionist principles was in part occupied by New Age culture, which stresses such values as universalism and a belief in alternative spiritualities. For example, culture critic Assaf Sagiv suggests that a 'neo-pagan ecstatic revival has filled the vacuum left by the demise of the old Zionism, and has been fuelled by a mistrust felt by many youth towards anything reminiscent of the grandiose

slogans and utopian promises of an earlier day.³⁴ According to Sagiv, the popularity of PEDMC among secular Israelis was in response to these changes in Israeli culture and society. Our findings support this argument by showing that *trancistim* attempt to break free from a cultural ethos with which they no longer overtly identify, through the adoption of practices and concepts that provide them with a notion of global affinity and appealing alternative spirituality.

The *dati leumi* communities have likewise been impacted by the inroads late modernism made into Israeli society and culture. With their exposure to the Internet and secular Israeli mainstream culture, young *dati'im* began questioning the norms of their parents. Yet, unlike their secular counterparts, this inquiry did not include the vital search for alternative ideologies or substitute belief systems. Thus, while young *dati'im* began to integrate contemporary secular behaviour into their Orthodox lifestyles and, for instance, embarked on overseas backpacking trips and listened to popular music, by and large they persisted in adhering to the tenets of religious Zionism. For this reason, *dati'im* adaptation of trance-dance parties reflects their desire to maintain their connection with mainstream secular Israeli society without the need to incorporate New Age philosophies or universalistic spirituality into their outlooks.

The differences in function that these parties fulfil for each of these two communities explain their variances in form. Secular *trancistim* enthusiastic embracement of global PEDMC manifests in *mesibot* which feature loud and intense music, bizarre decor, drugs and an individualised style of dance. In contrast, Orthodox *dosistim* have limited use for these PEDMC standards, and, therefore, *dosibot* have softer music, modest decorations, are devoid of illegal stimulants and participants' dance style resembles well-known traditional folk dances.

Our research, however, also reveals that beyond their general, cultural functions, these parties fulfil a more personal function for their participants. In interviews, *trancistim* indicated that not only are they fascinated with PEDMC as an ideology, but they also attend trance-dance parties for their component of escapism. In contrast, our interviews with *dosistim* revealed that not only do *dosibot* provide them with a link to the secular Israeli mainstream, but these events also allow them to fulfil a personal goal by providing unwed *dati'im* with a non-conventional yet welcoming platform for meeting one another. These additional motivations can explain further characteristic differences between these two kinds of parties. For instance, *trancistim* secrecy and exclusivity, their ongoing affiliation with PEDMC and independent asexual demeanour contrasted with the conventional settings and standard promotional methods used for advertising *dosibot*, *dosistim* fleeting affiliation with PEDMC and their group-centred manner of socialising. The differences in the cultural and personal functions that trance-dance parties fulfil for *trancistim/dosistim* are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Functions of secular *mesibot* vs. Orthodox *dosibot*.

Function	Secular <i>mesibot</i>	Orthodox <i>dosibot</i>
Cultural	global affinity, alternative spirituality	link to secular mainstream Israel
Personal	escapism	partnering

Yet, despite these differences, our study detected parallels in the attitude and deportment of participants at secular and Orthodox trance-dance parties, which seem to have an effect upon their ability to fulfil their goals. Even as *trancistim* identify with contemporary universalistic ideals, in essence, they paradoxically mimic traditional, pre-1990s, preferential Israeli socio-cultural attitudes. While claiming to be tolerant and egalitarian-minded, principles that form the basis of the post-Zionist narrative, in actuality, *trancistim* duplicate longstanding mechanisms of Ashkenazi elitism. Similarly, in an attempt to resist the collectivist nature that epitomised pre-1990 Israeli society, *trancistim* express present-day globalised norms of individuality by attending *mesibot* where, paradoxically, their individuality is dependent upon participation in a group dynamic. Moreover, even as they criticise Israeli ethnocentrism and the glorification of military service, *trancistim* use of soldierly-like conduct and the insertion of Jewish iconography within *mesibot* décor ironically reproduce these very elements within the outlandish party venues.

In an analogous fashion, our research demonstrates that despite *dosistim* application of secular Israeli mainstream formulae, in fact, their conduct mostly conforms with the behavioural codes of their parent communities. This is noted in *dosistim* simple dress style, minimal expenditures and the way in which they attempt to maintain a semblance of modesty within the aberrant *dosibot* setting. Moreover, this is confirmed by the fact that *dati'im* participate in *dosibot* in order to locate suitable marriage partners; that is, they attend these events in order to remain within the fold of their Orthodox community. As these examples suggest, both groups are mimicking the ideals they profess to be resisting. It appears, therefore, that *mesibot/dosibot* do not actuate significant changes to their participants' identities and that they provide a platform for the expression of their desires rather than their actual attainment.

It also turns out that although the rampant use of drugs at *mesibot* and the immodest sexuality at *dosibot* diverge from accepted cultural norms, *trancistim* and *dosistim* unconventional behaviour is not intended to challenge or otherwise modify their daily environment. This conclusion concurs with the argument put forth by Nissan Shor in his historical analysis of club and discotheque culture in Israel, according to which 'trance [parties] did not create a substitute reality ... At the end of the party, those in attendance went back to being themselves. Israelis'.³⁵ Our conclusion also corresponds with other recent ethnographic research on the socio-cultural implications of the New Age culture 'boom' currently taking place in Israel and may be explained by

the tendency of Israeli culture in general simultaneously to tolerate conformist and non-conformist behaviour from its citizens.³⁶ For example, even as contemporary Israeli society encourages individuality and freedom of expression, it nonetheless continues to honour collectivist ideals and suppress counter-hegemonic viewpoints.³⁷

From the above, it appears that the findings presented in this study differ from other PEDMC research conducted overseas that identifies 'trance culture' with 'insubordination' and 'dissent'.³⁸ Neither do they concur with research on trance-dance parties in other cultures according to which these events function as a vehicle for activism and cultural subversion.³⁹ Rather than attempt to activate cultural change, what *trancistim/dosistim* are in effect doing is transferring structural inconsistencies from their daily lives into unconventional, yet socio-culturally analogous, PEDMC arenas. This unique manner of PEDMC consumption is geared towards fulfilling particular needs and appears to manifest without altering the identities and cultural norms of respective affiliates, which may explain the popularity of trance-dance parties among diverse Israeli publics. Since this pattern of PEDMC usage emerged in spite of the differences between secular and Orthodox youth, it may likewise surface in trance-dance parties occurring among other subsets of local communities (e.g. the ultra-orthodox, Arabs, LGBT, Russian and Ethiopian immigrants). Thus, this article lays the foundation for additional studies of how PEDMC serves the needs of various local communities as they contend with the profound transitions taking place in present-day Israeli society and culture.

Notes

1. Shor, *Dancing with Tears*, 376.
2. Schmidt, "Full Penetration"; Leon, "Pilgrimage, Political Power and Youth Culture"; Meadan, "TRANCEnation ALIENation"; Ben-Dov, *Trance culture in Israel*; and Regev, "Trance Music in Israel".
3. PEDMC is an acronym for the specific culture we are writing about. The acronym EDMC refers to this same cultural construct *sans* its psychedelic element. Regev and Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture*, 183.
4. Tobin and Schmidt, "Comparing and Contrasting," 519–539.
5. Schmidt, "(En)Countering the Beat," 131–150.
6. A recent study on marijuana use among the general Israeli public estimated that roughly one million Israelis have used (illegal) cannabis in the past year, Channel 10 News Magazine, August 24, 2014.
7. LSD-25 stands for 'lysergic acid diethylamide' and is a synthetic hallucinogenic compound. MDMA, an abbreviation of 'methylenedioxymethamphetamine' is an empathogen known for inducing euphoric mind-states and intimacy with others.
8. See Beck, *Risk Society*; Hutton, *Risky Pleasures*; Redmon, "Playful Deviance," 27–51.
9. See Carmi, *TranceMission*, 92–94.
10. Hart and Lieberman, *Planet Drum*, 119–212.

11. Rushkoff, *Cyberia*, 161–162; See Gerard, “Selecting Ritual,” 1–16; Hutson, “The Rave: Spiritual Healing,” 35–50; Hutson, “Technoshamanism,” 53–77; Malbon, *Clubbing*; Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy*; St John, *Technomad*; Sylvan, *Trance Formation*; Takahashi, “The ‘Natural High,’” 145–164; and Takahashi, “Spirituality through the Science,” 239–266.
12. Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes*, 4; See Fornäs and Bolin, *Youth Culture in Late Modernity*; Hetherington, “Consumption, Tribes and Identity,” 241–250; Sweetman, “Tourist and Travellers?,” 79–93.
13. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 97; See Rill, “Rave, Communitas,” 648–661; Schmidt, “Hallucinatory Communitas”; St John, “Trance Tribes and Dance Vibes,” 149–173; Takahashi and Olaveson “Music, Dance, and Raving Bodies,” 72–96; Tramacchi, “Field Tripping,” 201–213; Walsh and Grob, “New Views of Timeless Experiences,” 62–64.
14. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 97.
15. Hanna, “Moving Messages,” 192.
16. Ibid., 192; cf. Treitler “Language and the Interpretation,” 32–56; Tobin and Schmidt, “The Language of Paradox,” 97–116.
17. Bennett, *Popular Music and Youth*, 94.
18. Ram, “The Promised Land,” 225–226.
19. Ibid., 225–226.
20. St John, “The Vibe,” 56–87; See Uriely and Belhassen, “Drugs and Risk-Taking,” 339–359.
21. Cohen, “The Knitted Kipa” 9–30; Ravitzky, *Religious and Secular Jews*.
22. Gitelman, *Religion or Ethnicity*; Lieberman and Yadgar, “Israeli Identity,” 163–183; Sheleg, *The New Religious Jews*.
23. Schachter, “*The Development*”; Sheleg, *The Jewish Renaissance*.
24. Goodman, “Contemporary Religious Zionist Youth,” 93–102; Sheleg, *The Jewish Renaissance*, 56–59.
25. Bartuv, “The Challenge of Being,” 29; cf., Rubin, “Marriage Age in the Texts,” 143–181.
26. Engelberg, “When Loves Spoils Integrity,” 280–291; Gorfein, *May it Happen to You Soon*; Rotem, “Why, for God’s Sake” (*Haaretz*, 20 May 2004); Zelzberg and Almog, “Perceptions of Singlehood”.
27. Taub, “The New *Dati Leumi* Bourgeois,” 5–9; Almog and Paz, “Ideological Currents”.
28. Nahari, “Now I am Between”.
29. Na’aman, “Is Leisure a Factor,” 743–764; see Bar-Lev, “The Impact of Modernity,” 5–11; Nir, “On Hasidism”.
30. Dowty, *Critical Issues*.
31. Almog, “The Globalization of Israel,” 233–256; Ben-Porat, “Political Economy,” 91–116.
32. Cohen, “Israel as a Post-Zionist,” 210; Ehrlich, “Zionism, Anti Zionism,” 63–97; Hazony, *The Jewish State*; Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline*; Weiss, “War Bodies, Hedonist Bodies,” 813–832.
33. Almog, *Goodbye Sroolik*; Furstenberg, “Post-Zionism”; Noy and Cohen, “Introduction,” 1–37; Taub, “The Shift in Israeli,” 187–199.
34. Sagiv, “Dionysus in Zion,” 155–178.
35. Shor, *Dancing with Tears*, 369.
36. Simchai, “Resistance Through Hugging”; Haviv, “Next Year in Kathmandu,” 45–86; Ruah-Midbar and Zaidman, “Everything Starts Within,” 421–436;

Ruah-Midbar and Klin-Oron, "Jew Age: Jewish Praxis," 33–63; Tavory, *Dancing in a Thorn Field*.

37. Herzog and Lahad, *Knowledge and Silence*.

38. St John, *Technomad*, 93–190.

39. *Ibid.*, 93–190.

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